

E 476

, 85-

. W 28

98

85-

28

8

Military Order of the Loyal Legion of the United States

Commandery of the District of Columbia

WAR PAPER

"Farragut and Mobile Bay—Personal
Reminiscences"

By

COMPANION

Rear-Admiral JOHN C. WATSON

United States Navy

No. 98

READ AT THE STATED MEETING OF
DECEMBER 16, 1916

Military Order of the Loyal Legion of the United States

Commandery of the District of Columbia

WAR PAPER

"Farragut and Mobile Bay—Personal
Reminiscences"

By

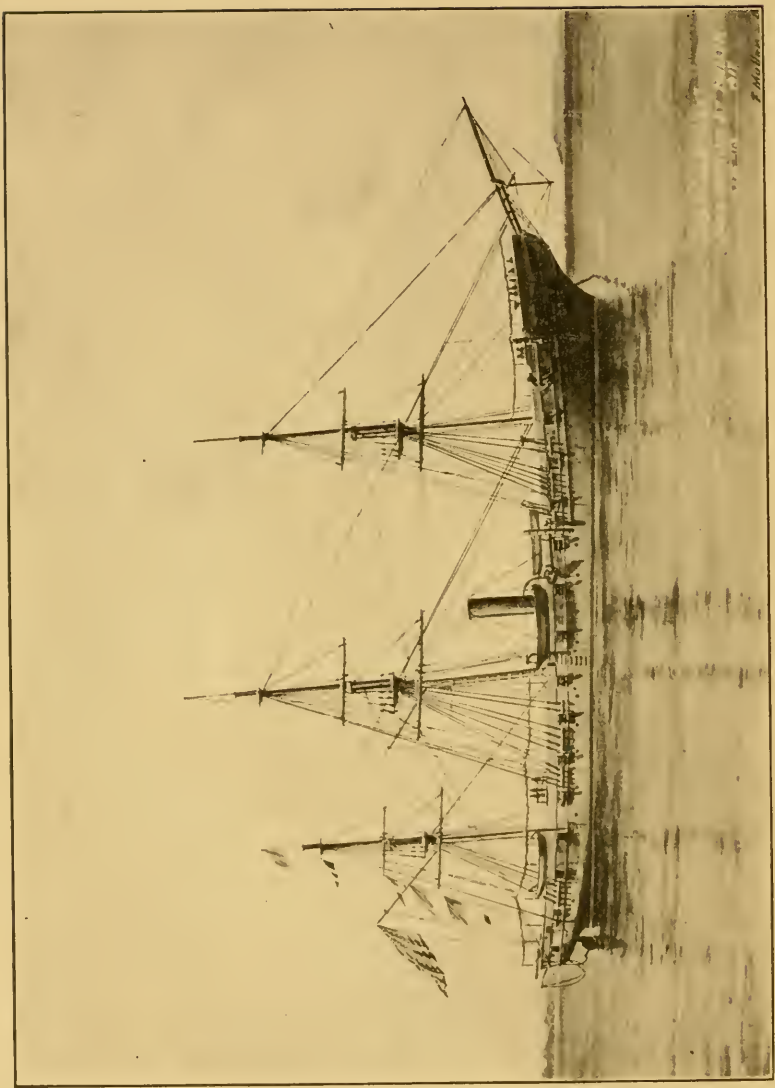
COMPANION

Rear-Admiral JOHN C. WATSON
United States Navy

No. 98

READ AT THE STATED MEETING OF
DECEMBER 16, 1916

L 7 16
.85
1922



U. S. FLAGSHIP HARTFORD

U. S. FLAGSHIP HARTFORD
1922

FARRAGUT AND MOBILE BAY—PERSONAL REMINISCENCES.

I most heartily wish that all his fellow-countrymen—you companions especially—could have known that noble American seaman, David Glasgow Farragut, who was trained from his early boyhood to give to his country the very best service of which he was capable. When Flag Officer Farragut hoisted his flag on the *Hartford* at the Philadelphia Navy Yard in January, 1862, I was a Master in the Navy and navigator of that ship. On being presented to him, in company with the other officers, he took me a little aside and told me, in the kindest possible way, that he was sorry to have to tell me I was not to remain on the *Hartford*, but was to be relieved by another Master (a grandson of Mr. Crittenden). His kind sympathy touched me, and I smilingly told him I was that fortunate Master who would sail aboard his flagship, and hoped and trusted that with the discharge of my duties I would win his confidence. At that time Farragut was over 60 years of age, but was remarkably active and alert, both bodily and mentally. He was just about my height and build, though after the summer of 1864 he grew much stouter. Up to that year he had on several successive birthdays tested his suppleness by holding with his right hand his left foot by the toe of the left shoe while he hopped through the bight or loop, forwards and backwards. He was a most accomplished fencer, and was not averse to testing his skill with the single stick against the most proficient seamen on board. When he spent an evening on shore he always wore his sword, feeling perfectly confident of his ability to protect himself with it from possible attacks in passing through the slums or along the wharves.

✓ Farragut was a very religious man. He loved to have me read to him from the Bible. He made it very evident that he always believed the issue was with God, while recognizing that he must do his best.

Farragut had a very high sense of duty, but at the same time he was considerate to those under him, as is shown by the following incidents: The *Sebago*, commanded by Lieut. Comdr. Fitzhugh, was one of the vessels selected to take part in the battle of Mobile Bay, but she was injured in collision, so that the Admiral decided not to let her go in. After this decision had been announced, Fitzhugh besought me, almost with tears in his eyes, to beg the Admiral to let him take part. I made the request, and Farragut answered that he deeply sympathized with Fitzhugh's desire to be in the battle, but he



ADMIRAL FARRAGUT AND HIS AIDE, LIEUTENANT-COMMANDER
J. C. WATSON

had to consider the public interest, and this required that only the most efficient ships be used. On receiving a jeweled sword,¹ which was presented to him by the Union League Club of New York for his brilliant services to the Union, he sent it forward for the crew to see, with the message that they had helped him to earn it.

In this connection my heart swells with joy and pride when I recall (in proof of the fact that I had won the Admiral's confidence by my discharge of the duties he entrusted to me as his confidential aid) the affection which he expressed for me. He once wrote to his son: "I am almost as fond of Watson as of yourself."

It was not very long after the capture and occupation of New Orleans that Farragut urged the seizure and occupation of Mobile Bay. He believed an inside blockade was the only absolutely efficient blockade. Furthermore, he thought the moral effect of the recent successful passage of the Mississippi River forts would count for a good deal, especially before the Bay forts were strengthened. Farragut informed General Butler that he was willing to undertake to pass in and hold the lower Bay if Butler would assist with even so small a force as 1,000 or 1,500 men. He never had the slightest doubt of being able to pass inside the Bay and cut the forts off from the upper Bay and city; but fully realized that as long as Forts Powell and Gaines prevented supplies reaching his ships he would be compelled, in a comparatively short time, to pass out again under the fire of Fort Morgan. General Butler was always willing to co-operate, but did not have sufficient troops to spare for this expedition. Banks, who succeeded Butler, considered it necessary to first occupy places on the Mississippi,

¹This jeweled sword has been presented to the Government by Mr. Loyall Farragut with the request that it be kept where it can be seen by the Admiral's fellow citizens. It will be exhibited in the historic section of the New National Museum.

and the Red River expedition was given precedence, contrary to General Grant's judgment. Official correspondence shows that Generals Canby and Gordon Granger were also willing to co-operate with Farragut as far as lay in their power. As time passed, Farragut became very urgent that Mobile Bay be taken and held, because of a credible report that the Confederates had built one ironclad at Selma and were building another. As a matter of fact, they had built one—the *Tennessee*—which, after most discouraging difficulties and disasters, was finally floated over Dog River bar on May 20, 1864, and brought to anchor under the guns of Fort Morgan, where she was observed flying the flag of the Confederate Admiral, Franklin Buchanan. Her officers soon found she was unseaworthy and so slow and sluggish in her movements, even in smooth water, as to be a failure as a ram. They concealed these facts, however, from their own people, as well as from the enemy. The Confederate newspapers were claiming that the *Tennessee* would go out and sink the blockaders or drive them away. Farragut's correspondence shows his eagerness for her to come out while he was on the spot, as he was firmly convinced that in a seaway he could destroy her with his heavy ships. After weeks of futile waiting for the *Tennessee* to come out he had to leave the blockade temporarily, and became exceedingly anxious to go in, provided he could have at least one monitor which would be able to follow the *Tennessee* in case she remained in shoal water where the heavy ships could not reach her. At last four monitors were promised him, and they were due at Sand Island not later than August 3. So it was arranged that the Union troops, under General Granger, were to land behind Fort Gaines on the afternoon of the 3d and threaten it, and that the fleet should attack the morning of the 4th. One of the monitors, the *Tecumseh*, accompanied by

the *Richmond*, did not arrive until about sunset the afternoon of the 4th, in spite of the utmost efforts of her commander (Commander T. A. M. Craven) and of Captain Thornton A. Jenkins, of the *Richmond*, commanding the Second Division of the fleet, to get her away from the Pensacola Navy Yard, prepared to take her part in the battle. This delay caused Farragut much mortification. The soldiers certainly got ahead of the sailors that time. As soon as the *Tecumseh* appeared I went aboard of her, delivered to Commander Craven the Admiral's instructions for the battle, and guided her to her anchorage. In the meantime, a party of Army signal officers arrived, and were distributed among the heavy vessels of the fleet. First Lieutenant J. C. Kinney, Thirteenth Connecticut, was assigned to the *Hartford*, and he has written a most interesting and detailed account of the Bay fight, called "An August Morning with Farragut," which appeared in the *Century* for May, 1881, and which has since been revised and extended in "Battles and Leaders of the Civil War."

An early breakfast was ordered for the next morning, August 5, and by 5 o'clock the seven smaller vessels which had been selected as consorts to the heavy ships had moved alongside of them, and about half past 5, when they had all been securely lashed in pairs, the Admiral, who was just finishing breakfast, directed Captain Drayton to signal the fleet to take the stations assigned and move in in obedience to instructions. I made the necessary signals. The ships got their positions very slowly, because of a slight haze, and proceeded in accordance with G. O. No. 10 and No. 11. The fleet was arranged in the following order, the monitors being slightly in advance and on the starboard side of the wooden ships:

<i>Octorora,</i>	<i>Brooklyn,</i>	<i>Tecumseh,</i>
Lt. Comdr.	Capt.	Comdr.
C. H. Green.	James Alden.	T. A. M. Craven.
<i>Metacomb,</i>	<i>Hartford,</i>	<i>Manhattan,</i>
Lt. Comdr.	Capt.	Comdr.
James E. Jouett.	Percival Drayton.	J. W. A. Nicholson.
<i>Port Royal,</i>	<i>Richmond,</i>	<i>Winnebago,</i>
Lt. Comdr.	Capt.	Comdr.
Bancroft Gherardi.	Thornton A. Jenkins.	T. H. Stevens.
<i>Seminole,</i>	<i>Lackawanna,</i>	<i>Chickasaw,</i>
Comdr.	Capt.	Lt. Comdr.
J. Donaldson.	J. B. Marchand.	G. H. Perkins.
<i>Kennebec,</i>	<i>Monongahela,</i>	
Lt. Comdr.	Capt.	
W. P. McCann.	J. H. Strong.	
<i>Itasca,</i>	<i>Ossipee,</i>	
Lt. Comdr.	Capt.	
George Brown.	W. E. LeRoy.	
<i>Galena.</i>	<i>Oneida,</i>	
Lt. Comdr.	Comdr.	
Clark H. Wells.	J. R. M. Mullany.	

The *Brooklyn* was given the honor of leading the column, in deference to the almost unanimous opinion of the commanding officers of the fleet, because she carried four heavy chase guns and an ingenious arrangement for picking up torpedoes. Far-ragut was loath to give up the leading position, believing that rank carried with it corresponding responsibility, but he finally yielded, for the above reasons. (See Diagram.)

G. O. No. 10 was as follows: "Strip your vessels and prepare for the conflict. Send down all your superfluous spars and rigging. Trice up or remove the whiskers. Put up the splinter nets on the starboard side, and barricade the wheel and steersmen with sails and hammocks. Lay chains or sand

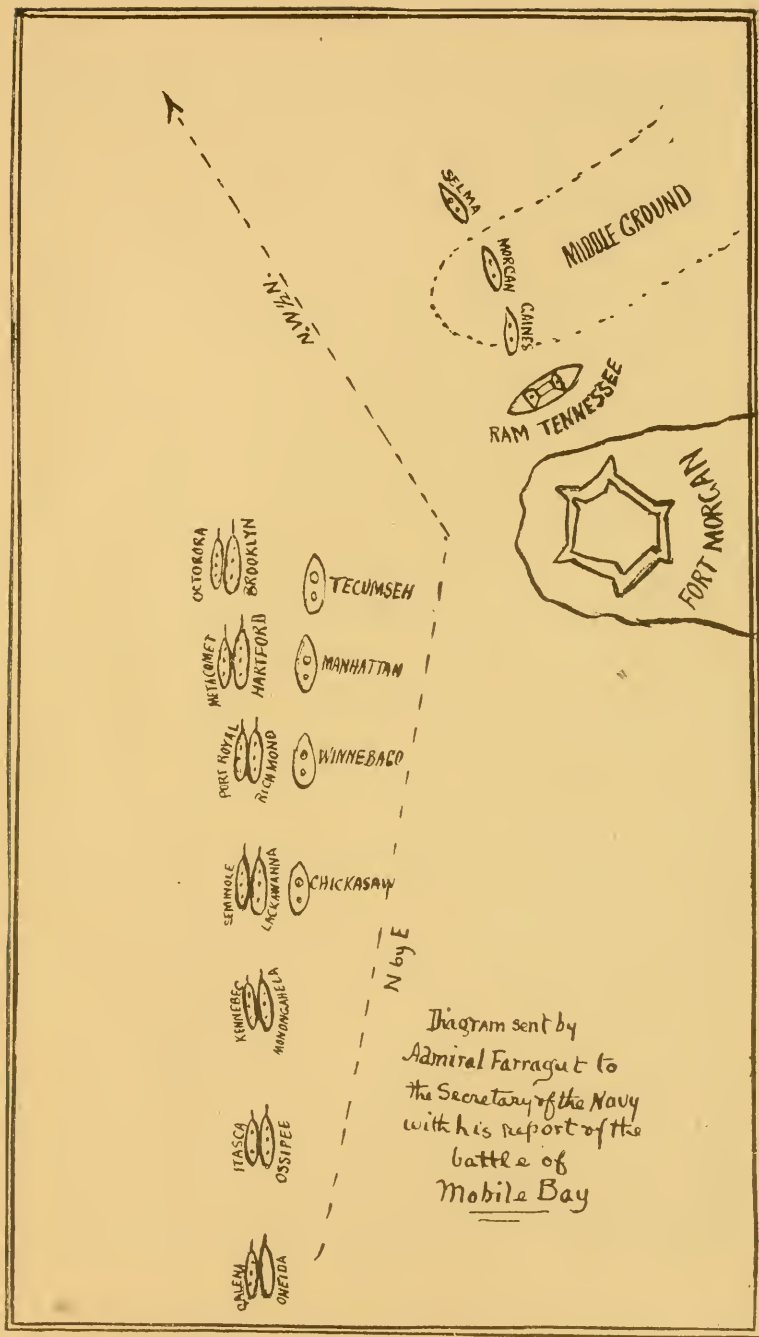


Diagram sent by
Admiral Farragut to
the Secretary of the Navy
with his report of the
battle of
Mobile Bay

bags on the deck over the machinery, to resist a plunging fire. Hang the sheet chains over the side, or make any arrangement for security that your ingenuity may suggest. Land your starboard boats or tow them on the port side, and lower the port boats to the water's edge. Place a leadsman and the pilot in the port quarter-boat. The ships will run past the forts in couples, lashed side by side, as hereinafter designated. The flagship will lead and steer from Sand Island N. by E. by compass until abreast of Fort Morgan, then N. W. half N. until past the Middle Ground, then N. by W., and the others, as designated in the drawing, will follow in due order until ordered to anchor; but the 'bow and quarter-line' must be preserved to give the chase guns a fair range, and each vessel must be kept astern of the broadside of the next ahead. Each vessel will keep a little on the starboard side of the next ahead, and when abreast of the fort will keep directly astern, and as we pass the fort will take the same distance on the port quarter of the next ahead, to enable the stern guns to fire clear of the next vessel astern. It will be the object of the Admiral to get as close to the fort as possible before opening fire. The ships, however, will open fire the moment the enemy opens upon us. Use short fuses for the shell and shrapnel, and as soon as within 300 or 400 yards give them grape. If one or more of the vessels be disabled, their partners must carry them through, if possible; but if they cannot, the next astern must render the required assistance, but as the Admiral contemplates moving with the flood tide, it will only require sufficient power to keep the crippled vessels in the channel. Vessels that can must place guns on the poop and topgallant forecastle and in the tops on the starboard side. Should the enemy fire grape, they will remove the men from the topgallant forecastle and poop to the guns below until out of grape range. The howitzers

must keep up a constant fire from the time they can reach with shrapnel until out of its range."

G. O. No. 11: "Should any vessel be disabled to such a degree that her consort is unable to keep her in her station, she will drop out of line westward and not embarrass the vessel next astern by attempting to regain her station. Should she repair damages so as to be able to re-enter the line of battle, she will take her station in the rear, as near the last ship as possible. So soon as the vessels have passed the fort and kept away to the N. W., they can cast off the gunboats at the discretion of the senior officer of the two vessels, and allow them to proceed up the Bay and cut off the enemy's gunboats that may be attempting to escape. There are certain black buoys placed by the enemy across the channel from the piles on the west side of the channel toward Fort Morgan. It being understood there are torpedoes and other obstructions between the buoys, the vessels will take care to pass eastward of the easternmost buoy, which is clear of all obstructions. The Admiral will endeavor to remove the others before the day of attack (as he thinks they support what will otherwise sink), and at least to destroy them for guides to the demons who hope to explode them. So soon as the vessel is opposite the end of the piles, it will be best to stop the propeller of the ship and let her run in with her headway and the tide, and those having side-wheel gunboats will continue on with the aid of their paddles, which are not likely to foul with their drag-ropes."

Before General Order No. 11 was issued, Farragut had the carpenter make some little wooden blocks, shaped like boats, with which he experimented on a table or board, on which the points of the compass were traced, to determine the best position of the vessels with reference to each other in entering the Bay. I used to help him maneuver the little blocks so as to con-

concentrate and maintain as heavy a fire as possible upon Fort Morgan when we should be going in, and also, after these General Orders were issued, we played with the blocks preparatory to practicing the ships in keeping close order when under way, at varying speeds.

Finally, after the completion of all details and the fleet was ready, about 6.45 a. m. of this glorious August 5th, the *Tecumseh* fired a scaling shot from each of her two 15-inch guns and then loaded each of them with the heaviest charge and a solid shot in anticipation of attacking the *Tennessee*. The ships drew slowly ahead, assisted by the young tide. Fort Morgan opened fire about 7.10 a. m., and the *Brooklyn* replied almost immediately with her bow-chasers; the other ships opening with their guns as soon as they would bear. All went well until about half past 7 o'clock, when the *Brooklyn*, having drawn ahead of the two river monitors, suddenly stopped, arresting the advance of the fleet. This threatened the most serious disaster, as the flood-tide was sweeping the ships together in confusion under the guns of the Confederate batteries. At the beginning of the action, Farragut was standing in the port main rigging on the sheer pole, just on a level with the hammock netting and quite near the commanding officer of the *Metacomet*, Jouett, who was standing on her starboard paddle box. He had gradually mounted higher and higher as the smoke grew denser, until he found himself in the futtock shrouds, just under the main top, where he was secured by a lashing, which Knowles, the Signal Quartermaster, carried up to him by direction of Captain Drayton. From this position Farragut hailed the deck to know why the *Brooklyn* had stopped. He was told she had signaled that she was forging ahead of the monitors. He ordered a signal made to her to signal the monitors to go ahead and to go ahead herself; this

signal was made by Lieutenant Kinney by wig-wag. Instead of going ahead, the *Brooklyn* was soon seen to be backing, and in doing so her bow swung across the bow of the *Hartford*, closing the narrow passage to the east of the line of torpedoes. Farragut hailed again, and all that could be distinguished of her reply was something about torpedoes. I was standing on the poop deck at the time, and heard the Admiral shout, on the instant, it seemed: "Damn the torpedoes! Full speed ahead, Drayton! Hard a starboard! Ring four bells! Eight bells! Sixteen bells!" I think he also called to Commander Jouett, of the *Metacombet*, to back, for she did so. By this movement we all knew that Farragut had decided suddenly to cross the torpedo field, which he had forbidden any of the ships to do. Some of us expected every moment to feel the shock of an explosion under the *Hartford* and to find ourselves in the water. In fact, we imagined that we heard some caps explode. If so, they failed to explode a torpedo, for we passed through the field in safety. Then there was a race between the *Brooklyn* and the *Richmond* as to which should be the first to follow the *Hartford*. The rest of the fleet followed in their wake, and probably no straighter course was ever kept than by these ships in passing over that torpedo field, the furrow made by the *Hartford* being accurately followed. Although this action of Farragut's seemed instantaneous, we learn from letters to his family that he had found time to ask God for guidance, and he believed he heard a voice say, "Go on!" On several previous occasions he had said to me that inevitably many of the torpedoes were leaky and would not explode, and a good many had probably drifted from their moorings.

In the meantime the *Tennessee* and the three other Confederate vessels had taken up positions inside the Bay so as to

rake the Union fleet as it changed its course in entering the Bay. This took them inside of, but to the west of the eastern red buoy. In her eagerness to attack the *Tennessee*, the *Tecumseh* put her helm to starboard and headed directly for her, her course taking her to the west, or wrong, side of this buoy. When she was within 200 yards of the *Tennessee* she was seen to reel and then plunge headfirst to the bottom. This disaster occurred just after the *Brooklyn* had begun to back. Some of the *Hartford's* crew raised a cheer, thinking it was the *Tennessee* which had been sunk; but Farragut, who had seen the accident, ordered Jouett to lower a boat and pick up any survivors.

My admiration for the Admiral knew no bounds when I realized that this appalling disaster had not affected his decision to cross the torpedo field. As the fleet was steaming up the Bay, after passing Fort Morgan, the *Monongahela* rammed the *Tennessee* on her port quarter, but the ram put her helm to starboard and it was only a glancing blow. The *Tennessee* poured a destructive broadside into the last ships of the fleet and then steamed to her anchorage under the guns of the fort.

While the fleet was anchoring up at the northern end of the lower Bay in obedience to orders from the flagship, Captain Drayton reported to the Admiral, who was standing near me on the poop deck, that the ram was under way and going out to sink the vessels left outside. Drayton was ordered to get the *Hartford* under way at once and follow her out. I confess that I heard this order with consternation, as it meant that we would have to run the gauntlet of the guns and torpedoes again. Farragut was soon convinced by observation the ram was heading for us, and he was impatient for the *Hartford* to get under way. I was ordered to signal the heavy ships in succession: "Destroy the enemy's principal ship by ramming her," which

was followed later by a general signal to the same effect. These signals were also wigwagged by the Army officers on board. The *Monongahela* and *Lackawanna* did ram the *Tennessee*, but without effect, and she continued to head straight for the *Hartford*. We had barely hove our anchor up when, under four bells, we tried to ram her. She put her helm to starboard, so the blow was only a glancing one, the two ships rasping along each other's sides in opposite directions. We gave her a broadside of solid 9-inch shot, but they had not the slightest effect on her. Just before striking her, Farragut jumped into the port mizzen rigging, above the poop deck, being eager to see the effect of the ramming. He laughed at my remonstrances as I seized the tails of his frock-coat and tried to prevent him from getting up there. I then caught up the end of the spanker vang, a small rope that happened to be handy, and, with his consent, secured him to the mizzen shrouds. I stood near him, just inside the rigging on the poop, with a drawn revolver, ready to get the drop on anybody aboard the ram who might try to pick him off. Her shells exploded on our berth deck, killing and wounding some of the powder division, but doing no serious damage to the ship. Shortly after this the ram's smokestack, which was already badly riddled, was broken off above the casemate when the *Lackawanna* struck her a second time, and the three monitors also punished her severely, the *Chickasaw* carrying away her steering gear and the *Manhattan* and *Winnebago* penetrating her casemate and jamming her port-shutters. Admiral Buchanan was wounded in the leg by one of these shots. She was now lying like a log in the water, and there was nothing left for her to do but to surrender, which she did as the *Ossipee* was about to ram her.

I failed to mention that as soon as we had passed inside of the three lines of torpedoes Jouett was permitted to cut and

cast off the lashings which secured the *Metacomet* to the *Hartford* and to chase the *Selma*, and, in obedience to orders, I made general signal: "Gunboats chase enemy gunboats." The *Metacomet* soon captured the *Selma* after a gallant fight, the *Gaines* was driven ashore near Fort Morgan in a sinking condition, and the *Morgan* escaped with comparatively slight damage, a passing bank of fog contributing materially to their escape from capture by our gunboats.

One of the most gallant things done that day was the handling of the *Metacomet's* boat by Acting Ensign Nields when he was sent to pick up the survivors of the *Tecumseh*, exposed to the broadside of the *Brooklyn* and the whole Confederate fire.

I was very much impressed by the fact that the character of the danger which we had to face in going into Mobile Bay had a markedly sobering effect upon the boldest and most daredevil among us. From the Admiral's detailed report, dated Mobile Bay, August 12, 1864, I quote in this connection: "Regular discipline will bring men to any amount of endurance; but there is a natural fear of hidden dangers—particularly when so awfully destructive of human life as the torpedo—which requires more than discipline to overcome."

I shall now quote two general orders, issued on August 6 and 7, after the surrender of Fort Gaines, as they throw additional light upon the character of this great man.

General Order, No. 12. Mobile Bay, August 6, 1864:

"The Admiral returns thanks to the officers and crews of the vessels of the fleet for their gallant conduct during the fight of yesterday.

"It has never been his good fortune to see men do their duty with more cheerfulness and courage; for, although they knew that the enemy was prepared with all devilish means for our

destruction, and though they witnessed the almost instantaneous annihilation of our gallant companions in the *Tecumseh* by a torpedo, and the slaughter of their friends, messmates and gunmates on our decks, still there were no evidences of hesitation in following their commander-in-chief through the line of torpedoes and obstructions, of which we knew nothing except from the exaggerations of the enemy, who had given out that we should all be blown up as certainly as we attempted to enter.

"For this noble and implicit confidence in their leader, he heartily thanks them.

"D. G. FARRAGUT,
"Rear Admiral Commanding,
"W. G. Blockading Squadron."

General Order, No. 13:

"The Admiral desires the fleet to return thanks to Almighty God for the signal victory over the enemy on the morning of the 5th instant."

This true-hearted sailor was as simple, direct and approachable as a child. He knew no such thing as pose. I close, commending to your thoughtful reading two letters written by him—one to his son, dated July 31, 1864, and the other to his wife, August 1, 1864—which show his character as an ideal husband and father.

The two books which best enable you to see him as he was are the "Life and Letters of David Glasgow Farragut," by Loyall Farragut, and Mahan's "Life of Farragut."

To those who enjoy stirring verse, I commend "The Bay Fight," by Acting Ensign H. H. Brownell, and "Farragut's Morn," by Paymaster William T. Meredith, both of whom served as officers in the *Hartford* during the battle; also some

stirring lines on "The Battle of Mobile Bay," by Commodore Thomas H. Stevens, United States Navy, who commanded the *Winnebago* during the battle.

JOHN CRITTENDEN WATSON,
Rear Admiral, U. S. Navy (retired).

NOTE.—Remarks by the Commander, Rear Admiral C. M. Chester, U. S. N.:

I am sure we have all been interested and instructed in listening to the admirable paper prepared by Companion Admiral Watson, and I have been especially pleased by its presentation, as I have for a long time urged the writer to place upon the records of the Order his personal recollections of Admiral Farragut at the Battle of Mobile Bay, as the one man who was in intimate association with the great Admiral on that momentous occasion, and now the only living veteran of the war who could give such testimony first-hand. The innate modesty of Admiral Watson has frustrated all my efforts to secure this valuable contribution to the history of the Civil War until the present time; and of the many personal episodes of that great battle, in which he took so conspicuous a part, which he does not mention, I should like to give a personal recollection of my own regarding his activities preceding the battle.

It will be remembered that Admiral Farragut stated in General Order No. 11 that he hoped to be able to have some of the obstructions at the entrance to Mobile Bay removed before the battle took place, and for this very important work Lieutenant Watson volunteered, and was permitted to perform the dangerous undertaking. The first and most important battle of Mobile Bay took place on Friday, August 5, 1864 (the second being the capture of Fort Morgan by the combined operations of the Army and Navy, on August 23, two weeks later). On the Sunday night preceding the battle, Lieutenant Watson took charge of a large cutter, armed and equipped for action, and, with muffled oars, entered the Bay, in spite of the strong picket guard maintained by the Confederates to prevent such incursions. He tackled the long line of torpedoes strung across the channel, which were held in place and at a distance of about 10 feet below the surface of the water by a number of buoys placed at intervals in prolongation of the line, and sunk one or more of them. This daring exploit was repeated by Watson on Monday night and again on Wednesday night (Tuesday night being skipped for some reason, possibly to let the young man make up some needful rest, as each undertaking was an all-night job). On this last, or Wednesday, night that it was possible to act before the fight, Watson's boat crew worked so long and assiduously to drill a hole in one

✓ of the most important iron buoys he had to deal with in order to sink it, in spite of the danger of drawing the attention of the enemy, to his work by the sound of "his big bass drum," that daylight caught him in the act, and he was forced to make a precipitous retreat to regain his ship and take part in the Battle of Mobile Bay. How far he entered the Bay on these several occasions in the darkness of the night I doubt if the Admiral knew himself; but as Tuesday morning he brought back with him "five deserters from Fort Gaines," he evidently was in close touch with the enemy. This gallant effort of the Flag Lieutenant of the Fleet to carry out Admiral Farragut's aim to remove the obstruction, which would have secured him the Victoria Cross had he been a British naval officer, made a deep impression on my youthful mind as a lad who had just escaped from the Naval Academy to take part in the war; but I doubt if my friend could recall the deed the main facts of which are recorded in the Log Book of the *Hartford*.





LIBRARY OF CONGRESS



0 013 703 936 9



C

LIBRARY OF CONGRESS



0 013 703 936 9

